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Statistical capacity-building

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report which was prepared at the request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session,** provides an overview of the work undertaken by the United Nations Statistics Division to support national efforts in building and strengthening national statistical capacity. In particular, it describes the division of the overall programme into three subject domains supplemented by capacity-building related to Millennium Development Goals indicators.

Further, the report gives details on the implementation of the programme per domain in terms of activities executed under the regular programme for technical cooperation or through donor funding. It also describes progress in the coordination of statistical capacity-building among regional and international agencies. The Commission may wish to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2009/1.
** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2008, Supplement No. 4* (E/2008/24), chap. I.A.

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I. Introduction

1. On 24 July 2006, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 2006/6 in which the Council explicitly called on Member States to intensify their efforts to strengthen national statistical capacity in order to produce reliable and timely statistics and indicators for the monitoring of national development policies and strategies; and the implementation of commitments and the achievement of all development goals at the national, regional and international levels. In the same resolution, the Council called upon the United Nations system, including the United Nations Statistics Division and the regional commissions and international agencies, to support national efforts in building and strengthening national statistical capacity, in particular of developing countries.

2. A first progress report on the Statistics Division's programme of strengthening national statistical capacity (E/CN.3/2007/14) was submitted for discussion to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session in 2007. It provided an overview of the work undertaken by the Division in 2006, with special attention focussed on work related to the Millennium Development Goals indicators. The Commission agreed with the report's recommendations on future steps and stressed that capacity-building activities of international agencies at the country level should be demand-driven rather than supply-driven, and that any assistance provided to countries should have a long-term perspective on building their capacity to produce necessary data in a sustainable way rather than an ad hoc approach limited to finding short-term solutions.[1]

3. The present report describes the strategy and implementation of capacity-building activities of the Statistics Division, and the coordination of such activities among the international agencies. In particular, it describes the division of the Statistics Division's programme into three subject domains supplemented by capacity-building related to Millennium Development Goals indicators; reviews its capacity-building activities for the period 2006-2008; and outlines progress made in coordination within this area through the meetings of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities.

II. Strategy of statistical capacity-building

4. To meet the overall objective, the capacity-building programme provides advisory services, implements workshops, organizes study tours, and makes available statistical toolkits in three subject domains supplemented by activities related to the Millennium Development Goals indicators. These domains are (a) national statistical systems, (b) population censuses and social statistics and (c) national accounts, basic economic statistics, environment statistics, and environmental-economic accounting frameworks.

5. The first domain covers activities directly related to the organization of national statistical systems, such as the building of better institutional arrangements, improved legal frameworks, better organizational structure and management of

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2007, Supplement No. 4* (E/2007/24), chap. I, sect. B, decision 38/111, paras. (a) and (d).

human resources and a more effective data compilation and dissemination programme.

6. The main task within the domain of population censuses and social statistics currently and for subsequent years is to assist member States in the implementation of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses to be undertaken during 2005-2014. The Division will provide advisory services to countries, subregions and regions; assist countries in developing project documents; and develop and update training materials in the area of population and housing censuses. During the biennium 2010-2011, it aims to provide technical assistance, particularly to those developing countries expected to conduct a population census.

7. Another focus area is the development of gender statistics through the building of capacities in developing countries directed towards the incorporation of a gender perspective in national statistical data-collection systems in general, and in the measurement of informal sector and violence against women in particular. The programme further highlights the need for these statistics in response to requirements for monitoring progress towards the attainment of gender equity goals and targets, including the Millennium Development Goals.

8. Within the domain of national accounts, basic economic statistics, environment statistics, and environmental-economic accounting frameworks the priorities are (a) implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts (2008 SNA), (b) implementation of the revised recommendations in areas of basic economic statistics, such as industry statistics, international trade statistics, distributive trade statistics, and tourism statistics and (c) implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA).

9. In response to the request of the Statistical Commission to implement the 2008 SNA, the Division, in cooperation with the Statistical Office of the European Communities, organized in Luxembourg in May 2008, a conference on international outreach and coordination in national accounts for sustainable development and growth. The conference resulted in the Luxembourg Recommendations on Global Implementation and Outreach for the System of National Accounts, which have an objective to facilitate the implementation of the 2008 SNA and basic economic statistics in developing countries, while ensuring that national, regional and international actions are sustainable and efficient; and to improve the quality, production and dissemination of national accounts and related basic statistics at the country level in a sustainable manner.

10. The Statistics Division will increase its efforts to assist developing countries through capacity development training in the areas of national accounts, industrial statistics, distributive trade statistics, international trade statistics, international economic classifications, tourism statistics, energy statistics, environment statistics, and environmental-economic accounting. Knowledge transfer will be supported by the production of guidelines in hard copy and electronic format, and by further developing web-based knowledge resources for economic statistics.

11. The Statistics Division through its regular programme and the donor-funded projects will continue to assist developing countries with capacity development training in the areas of Millennium Development Goals indicators, and monitoring of Millennium Development Goals. As outlined in Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6, the objective of these capacity-building efforts is to improve the

coverage and transparency of, and reporting on, all indicators in order to enhance the database on all Millennium Development Goals (see also E/CN.3/2009/16).

12. To ensure effective delivery of the enlarged capacity-building programme, the Statistics Division established, in 2008, a section in the Director's office dedicated to capacity development. This section communicates with donors on the one hand and facilitates communication among countries, the Division's substantive officers and regional or international partners on the other to achieve the objective of delivering technical assistance that is country-driven and sustainable. The section coordinates the organizational and administrative components of all activities run by the Division.

13. The Statistics Division also continues to forge strategic partnerships at different levels, and it draws on the strengths and capacities of and synergies with the regional commissions, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Tourism Organization, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank and other subregional, regional and international institutions.

14. The approach for delivering technical assistance is essentially the same for each programme. Assistance is delivered through (a) advisory services involving skilled in-house and outsourced technical experts who address specific needs of a more technical nature; (b) national, regional and interregional training workshops designed to promote more effective transfer of knowledge; and (c) strengthening linkages between developing countries through exchange of best practices via study visits and fellowships.

15. In an effort to build on the existing training work conducted by national statistical training centres, the Statistics Division is launching an initiative to establish a global network among those training centres and to assist in the development of subregional leading centres. As a first step into that direction, the Division has conducted an ad hoc inquiry among national statistical offices around the world to obtain information on their current national training programmes and determine their ability to provide national training for nationals from other countries in their subregion. Ninety-six countries responded to the inquiry, indicating that there is both existing capacity and considerable interest in this kind of networking. The Division will analyse the results in more detail and will keep the Commission informed on the status of this initiative.

III. Implementation of programmes in 2006-2008 and future programme plans

16. In the period 2006-2008, the Statistics Division organized 100 workshops, seminars and conferences through which about 5,800 national experts from 176 different countries or areas received training. In addition, many fellowships and study tours were organized, giving 510 national experts additional opportunities to gain knowledge and experience. Furthermore, about 145 advisory services were provided to countries by the Division's experts (interregional advisers and regular staff), resource persons from partner organizations and consultants, including specific country missions in the areas of statistical data processing, environmental-

economic accounting and population and housing censuses planning and management. Highlights of the main programmes are provided below.

17. The Statistics Division has an extensive evaluation system, through which feedback is collected in the short term (upon conclusion of the event) and in the longer term (four months after the event). The feedback received by the Division over the last three years has been consistently positive. A large majority of workshop participants stated that they had acquired substantive knowledge on how to produce data (85 per cent), analyse data (70 per cent) and disseminate data (75 per cent). In follow-up surveys to measure longer-term impact, more than 80 per cent of participants stated that they used the workshop materials in their daily work. Encouragingly, more than 60 per cent further stated that they had been able to implement the workshops' recommendations or had trained other staff in their offices. The training activities' multiplier effect, in particular, is important for achieving the objective of sustaining statistical capacity. In evaluations carried out after advisory missions, countries indicated that the missions had been excellent or good, and that they had provided their offices with new statistical knowledge. In the follow-up survey, it was found that, in most countries, recommendations made by the advisers had been implemented. Some highlights of implementation for the various domains are presented below.

A. National statistical systems

18. In 2006-2008, the Statistics Division held workshops, provided advisory services and supported fellowships to enhance national statistical systems. In the context of the 2010 round of population censuses, the monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals indicators and the implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts, serious resource demands for the coming years will require optimal management of the national statistical system. In this light, the Division's capacity development workshops and advisory services will be geared towards the improvement of the organizational structure of the national statistical system, improved management of human resources and an effective system of data dissemination. In July 2006, with the help of statistical offices around the world, the Division launched the Development of National Statistical Systems website, to serve as the knowledge centre on official statistics. The development of this website reflects the Division's commitment to facilitating the sharing of experiences and best practices in the management and development of national statistical systems.

19. The development account project for the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was about 60 per cent implemented at the end of 2008. Activities undertaken included workshops on organization of the national statistical system, energy statistics, gender and employment, Millennium Development Goals-related statistics, and vital statistics and civil registration. Three more training workshops have been scheduled for 2009. Moreover, another important project goal is strengthening of the information technology network among the SADC countries, which is being achieved by modernizing and updating the website of the SADC secretariat so that it may better serve as a community tool for dissemination of information, and by upgrading some of the statistical software at the national statistical offices.

20. The development account project for the countries of South Asia started with a workshop on the organization of national statistical systems and user-producer relations in July 2008. The project objective is to strengthen the capacity of the countries and relevant regional institutions to carry out the production and analysis, on a regular basis, of benchmark statistics required for national development planning and for the monitoring of Millennium Development Goals. Workshops on national accounts and the use of information technology are being organized in the first half of 2009. The other two development account projects, on the African statistical knowledge networks and the low-income countries of South-East Asia, include proposals for activities in 2009, approval for which is being sought from the respective steering committees.

B. Population censuses and social statistics

21. This programme had been established in 2005 to support the 2010 round of population censuses and will continue at least through 2010. The focus of the programme shifts slightly from year to year. In 2006, the programme's focus was on finalizing the second revision of *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*.[2] In line with the programme's objectives, the participation of developing countries in this revision work was actively encouraged, with a view to ensuring that the revisions would include a wide array of perspectives from both developed and developing countries. The Statistical Commission adopted the revised set of principles and recommendations at its thirty-eighth session in 2007,[3] and invited all national statistical authorities to ensure their full implementation. The Division then initiated a process for developing an Africa addendum to the current set which would address issues of harmonization and topics relevant to the region. This initiative was endorsed by the second Africa Symposium on Statistical Development held in Kigali in 2007.

22. A long-term attempt to continually monitor successive stages of the census process so as to ensure that guidelines and best practices are developed or updated in a rational manner has led to the development of an online 2010 World Census Programme Resource Centre whose purpose is to provide direct technical and methodological assistance to census-takers. Its main functions are to provide information and news on census-taking worldwide and to serve as a knowledge base and user-friendly repository of technical and methodological documentation.

23. The theme in 2007 had been census cartography and the use of new technologies such as geographical information systems (GIS) and the Global Positioning System (GPS). These new techniques are crucial for efficient preparation of census maps and for dissemination and analysis of census data, especially in case of emergencies and in the context of meeting disaster management requirements. In 2008, the main focus was on census data processing (data capture and data editing), especially the optical technologies for data capture. In the period 2007-2008, 11 regional training workshops were conducted in line with the stated objectives, covering topics such as international standards for census-taking,

[2] *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2*, Statistical Papers, No. 67/Rev.2 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.XVII.8).

[3] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2007, Supplement No. 4* (E/2007/24), chap. I, sect. B, decision 38/102, para. (a).

enhancing census quality, census capture and census editing, and training in use of contemporary technologies for census geography. About 450 participants from more than 100 countries were trained.

24. The Division co-organized the Global Forum on Gender Statistics in Rome in December 2007. The Forum was the first of what will be a series of international meetings on gender statistics to be held annually with the purpose of promoting the advancement of quality gender statistics among decision makers and other stakeholders. Its key objectives were to re-establish the platform for global collaboration among all partners in the work on the development of gender statistics, review technical and methodological developments in that regard and officially launch the Global Gender Statistics Programme (GGSP).

C. National accounts, economic statistics, environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting frameworks

25. It is expected that, pursuant to the preparation of the Luxembourg Recommendations, more capacity-building activities focused on the implementation of the 2008 SNA will be organized in 2009. On the other hand, many workshops, advisory services and fellowships have also been organized in the period 2006-2008 to transfer knowledge and improve compliance with international standards in various areas of basic economic statistics, in particular international economic classifications, industry and manufacturing statistics, international trade statistics, and distributive trade statistics. Similarly, capacity-building activities were organized in the areas of environment statistics and energy statistics. All those activities were funded through the Statistics Division's regular programme of technical cooperation and through the development account projects.

26. For the purpose of implementing the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, an interregional adviser conducted nine country missions in the period 2007-2008, entailing the provision of advice, especially on water accounting. In general, the tasks of the adviser are to provide advisory services to countries, subregions and regions; to assist countries in developing project documents; and to develop and update training materials of environmental-economic accounting. Services of an interregional adviser in this area are expected to be available through 2011.

D. Millennium Development Goals indicators

27. In its attempt to promote the collation, availability and dissemination of data for the purpose of monitoring Millennium Development Goals indicators at both the country and international levels, the Statistics Division has become the executing agency of a multi-year donor-funded programme. The pilot phase started in 2008 with the collation and assessment of national Millennium Development Goals indicators in five pilot countries, namely, Bolivia, Cambodia, Liberia, Morocco and the United Republic of Tanzania. The project will produce a prototype Millennium Development Goals data portal presenting national and international Millennium Development Goals data with background information so as to allow users to understand the quality of and eventual discrepancies between them. These data will be supplemented with data and experiences from other countries obtained through

regional workshops and country missions. On the basis of these pilot activities the final output will be a proposal for the overall design and implementation of the system, which should commence in the second half of 2009.

IV. Coordination of statistical capacity-building

28. The Statistics Division, as mandated by the Statistical Commission, assists in donor coordination of statistical-capacity activities, which, at the country level, should be demand-driven rather than supply-driven and should have a long-term perspective on building capacity in a sustainable way. Work to that end has been initiated within the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities.

29. The Committee formed four task teams to review issues of coordination and provide recommendations for further work on (a) reporting mechanisms for statistical capacity-building activities; (b) capacity-building through regional training initiatives for national statisticians (and regional training centres); (c) review of modalities for coordination of technical cooperation programmes at the subregional level; and (d) assessment of the effectiveness of capacity-building activities in Africa. At the twelfth session of the Committee, held in Tunis in September 2008, the work of all the task teams was reviewed; the Statistics Division presented a report that included an inventory of regional training centres (for more detailed information, see E/CN.3/2009/21).

V. Conclusion

30. The Statistics Division has successfully and significantly stepped up its statistical capacity-building programme over the last three years in line with Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6 and the recommendations of the Statistical Commission with respect to strengthening statistical capacity. The Division will continue to improve and expand its programme and will report to the Commission at the end of the biennium 2008-2009. The Commission may wish to take note of the present report.